19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

usually heriditary, but he might have no son or nephew to succeed him. In that case the elders chose one of their own number as his successor. In so far as the villagers obeyed any authority at all, they obeyed him.[1] They generally observed his commands, although he possessed no well-defined jurisdiction. Ordinary quarrels, disputes relating to land, questions concerning the ownership of animals, etc., were referred to him for settlement. In most instances his court was a free and informal meeting of villagers and elders; and his decision, incorporating the opinion of the latter, would have the sanction of the group and be accepted by the parties concerned. He was the patriarch of the village, and often its high priest as well. A foray would not be undertaken without his consent. He was accorded the place of honor in the family living-room, which was usually the mat on the side facing eastward. If his rule became extremely displeasing to the villagers, they quietly went to a different site from that chosen by him at the time of the annual migration of the village. Thus, he would be left with only those who remained loyal to him, usually his relatives. The other families were now free to select a new chief or headman.

The chief levied no taxes. He tilled his field like his fellow villagers. He often received gifts of choice game, fruit, or grain; but these were largely a tribute to his personal popularity. If the village was about to engage in a raid, he might assess the people for the purpose of fitting out the expedition; but this would bring him no direct personal benefit, unless he was the organizer of it himself. The Karen had no caste of chiefs, no royal family, or even a privileged social class. Every member of the community shared alike in the ordinary tasks and the privations or prosperity of the seasons.

COMMUNITY LIFE

Wealth formed the only basis of social distinctions in the village life. But this made little difference in outward conditions. The land was free and belonged to the community. Every man was at liberty to take for his own use as many acres of hillside as he could fell. On this score there was little chance for inequality. However, the accumulation of money, which in the early days was represented by silver ingots, later by rupees, enabled one to purchase buffaloes or cattle or even an elephant, although the last was more often caught than bought. The ownership of a bronze drum brought more distinction to a family than that of seven elephants.

[1] [i.e. the chief -- analyst.]

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

"Hkü Te" is to be seen as a rainbow in the west occasionally. At such times, according to one version of the legend, he is lowering a tube through which to drink the liquor provided at wedding-feasts. When a rainbow appears in the west early in the morning, the king of hades is again in the sky, this time setting up a funeral post ("t le") for his children.[6] From this it seems that he has had several offspring, but his wife has never borne him any since their son-in-law thwarted their plot against his life in the remote past. The funeral post is intended to remind men that many persons have died without receiving proper burial ceremonies. Such neglect entails some sort of a calamity. Hence, the Karen are stricken with terror when they observe the rainbow arching the western heavens early in the morning, especially if this sign is accompanied by thunder and earthquake. Under such circumstances they will not go to their work, for it is tabu.[7] If a Karen should point at such a rainbow, he would at once thrust his finger into his navel in order to avoid the loss of the offending member. This act is called "ugh de de."

The people say of the rainbow in the east that at the time "Teu Kweh," wife of "Hkü Te," became the bow of promise in the sky she was pregnant, and, being now separated from the earth, she is seen from time to time in the east going to draw water for herself. The souls of women who die with child are supposed to have no other means of obtaining drink, except from the rainbow divinity. When two rainbows appear in the east, the upper and larger one is her husband, who is visiting with her.

The second group of spirits among the Karen comprises those who have spent some time on earth as human beings, but have not gained entrance into the realm of the dead because they were denied funeral rites either on account of their bad character or on account of their having died by violence. Hence they are doomed to wander about, avenging themselves upon mortals. As they are supposed to be particularly occupied with this mission at nightfall, the Karen think it imprudent to be out during the early evening.

This division consists of three groups of beings. The first are "Th' re ta hka," or ghosts of those who have died violent deaths or have been carried off by epidemics of cholera, smallpox, etc. and could not, therefore, be given proper funeral ceremonies. They are believed to bring violent deaths and epidemics upon mortals, prob-

[6] See Chapter XX on Funeral Customs, p. 200.
[7] See Chapter XXVIII on Tabu, p. 220.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

776 older tribes in the country, but have become the common property of the Karen for several generations back.

773 823 The Titan Atlas of the ancient Greeks, supporting a globe, has his counterpart in "Hsi gu maw ya" or "Maw ya," as he is sometimes called. He is a brother of "Y'wa" and holds the world on his shoulders. When he grows weary, he shifts it from one side to the other and thus causes earthquakes. Sometimes the beetles that feed on the refuse of human beings report to him that they are starving, because there are no more people to supply them with food. This so angers him that he shakes himself and produces a series of earth-tremors. As these phenomena are common in Burma, the Karen seek to quiet them by shouting out: "We are still here. We are still here." Work is tabu during the day on which an earthquake occurs.[11]

776 821 The semiannual change of seasons can not but attract the attention of the people living in Burma. For the Karen a company of demons, the "Law," is responsible for the wet season and another group, the "Hku de," for the dry season. The former, who are sometimes named the "Law hpo" (signifying a company of them), are believed to have cities and dwellings in the upper regions, whence they regulate the rainfall and reveal themselves in the thunder and lightning. The flashes of lightning are nothing less than the flapping of their wings and the thunder is the rattle of their flying shafts against their foes, the "Hku de."

824 776 231 The "Law" are also regarded as the source of the fructifying power in all plants and trees that form their fruits in the wet season. The grain is said to be conceiving when the kernels are developing, and the "Law hpo" are said to be the husbands who bring this about. Their function is to provide the plants, especially the paddy which is heading during the latter part of the rainy season, with the "sgheu" (the life-giving principle), that is, the vaporous substance that comes from the land of the dead and revives all life on the earth.[12] The scarcity of domestic animals among the Karen is attributed to these demons, who are alleged to have raised such a stifling dust by shooting their shafts against the rocks that the creatures took refuge in the jungle and became wild before they could be caught again.

831 776 The enemies of the "Law," the "Hku de," are also demons of the upper air with a human appearance, but no abiding-place. Dur-

[11] See Chapter XXVIII on Tabu, p. 289.
[12] See Chapter XXI on Religious Conceptions, p. 222.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

Certain stones ("ler na") and some plants of the ginger family ("paw na") are credited with having the ability to consume food. If offered raw flesh and blood, they prefer the latter. The owners of such specimens can cause harm to any one against whom they have a grudge. In case one of the "ler na" is sent to a person, it takes on the appearance of the owner and produces the death of the recipient. Such stones, according to report, are usually picked up in swampy places, glow in the dark, and will eat into one's flesh like an acid. It seems to be customary to send one of these carnivorous stones to the intended victim when he is in a weakened condition on account of sickness. He is, therefore, in a physical state to experience such an hallucination as that referred to above.

To counteract the effects of the "ler na," a medicine is compounded from the gall-bladder of one who has suffered a violent death and been stolen from the grave at night. The remains of the gall-bladder are mixed with the charred dust scraped from the bamboos used in piercing the corpse when it was being burned. These ingredients are moistened with water and shaped into a ball, from which the patient takes doses when he finds the spell of the magic stone asserting itself. Other fragments of the medicine-ball are pulverized and scattered in the air about the patient. This internal and external treatment is supposed to afford both cure and protection from the menace of the "ler na."[7] Another method (called "po") of preventing witches and wizards from working their evil spells, is by inserting twigs of the indigo plant in the split ends of three sticks, spitting on the twigs, and offering a prayer for deliverance.

Much of the magic of the Karen prophets and "medicine-teachers" is concerned with recalling the "k'las" of sick persons. The multitude of demons and powers by which the tribesman believes himself to be surrounded, renders it next to impossible for him to tell which of these spirits is assailing him when he falls ill. Hence he calls in a diviner, unless he should undertake to consult the chicken bones or make marks on a bamboo, in order to determine for himself the cause of his sickness. When he has learned the cause, he makes offerings to placate the particular spirit concerned. In case his recovery is not as rapid as he thinks it ought to be, he calls in some "wi" to find out what the matter is and what he must do. The "wi" who was summoned to prescribe for a sick grandmother some years ago, inspected the chicken bones several times and, when

7 Dr. Wade, The Karen Thesaurus, new ed., Vol. I, p. 463.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

cribe the portent to some angry demon, who may at any moment impose a worse calamity upon them if they fail to observe this warning. The tabu of labor, until their fears have subsided, is clearly the precept that would suggest itself to people of deep-seated superstitions. According to Karen legend, the dogs that cause the eclipse of the moon by eating that luminary, are colder than water; while the one that swallows the sun, is hotter than fire. In order to prevent excessive heat or cold and the sickness and death that would follow, the people must abstain from work on the days when an eclipse occurs. The Karen name for the tabu of the eclipse is "ta dü ta yu mü ta yu la." [7]

The portent of the earthquake is produced by the mythical giant, "Hsi Ghu," when the beetle that feeds on the refuse of human beings, tries to deceive him into believing that the human race has disappeared from the earth. In his wrath the giant shifts the planet from one shoulder to the other, and the people shout to him in consternation: "We are still here. We are still here." When, in times past, the giant caught the beetle in this trick, he struck it in the face, and the beetle has had a flat nose ever since. At the time of an earthquake the people refrain from their work for a day, in order to help restore the equilibrum of the planet and to mollify "Hsi Ghu." This practice is called the tabu of the earthquake or "ta dü haw hko hu." [8]

When the apes howl it is a portent that the goddess "Ta La." who dwells on Mount "Thaw Thi," [9] one of the higher peaks of the mountain range separating the Toungoo district from Karenni, is uttering curses, which are greatly feared. In Shwegyin the people ascribe the falling of the leaves in the latter part of February to her imprecations and refrain from work for three days. They believe that if they failed to observe this "ta dü hpa taw" (the long tabu), their crops would be ruined.

The portent of strange sounds in the jungle betokens a combat between two celestial beings, one of whom, "Kwe De," hurls his spear at the other. The whizz of the weapon as it speeds through the air and its thud on striking the ground, evoke the cry, "Htaw law," from those who hear these startling sounds. They must stay at home that day, lest they should be in danger from these mythical spears.

[7] See Chapter VII, p. 54.
[8] See Chapter XXII, p. 220.
[9] See Chapter XXV, p. 262.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

784 cerned. In the hills the money is put in a hole in the bamboo ladder
177 leading into the house or, in lieu of a money payment, the fowl is
342 hung under the house. Some persons, who have received the fine in the latter form, have shown a prejudice against eating it. I have been told that the British Government officials have upheld this tabu, when the collection of the fine has been resisted by the offending party.

784 Perhaps there is no more widespread tabu among the Karen
551 people than that of personal names.[19] I have known some individuals for years without knowing their names and have used the common expedient of calling them by the name of their eldest son. A man who served as our cook for years in the Baptist school at Tharrawaddy I knew only as "Ba Gyaw's father;" although I did finally discover his own personal name. For a boy to mention his father's name is almost equivalent, according to Karen ideas, to the son's wishing his parent's death; for the spirits, learning the latter's identity, might destroy him. Instead of speaking of his wife, a man will talk of the mother of his children, or of his oldest child whose name he may think it safe to mention. Not long ago a young man of good education, who was engaged in filling his blank application for a marriage certificate, was confronted with the fact that he was unable to give his mother's name. Not infrequently parents bestow opprobrious names on their children, in order to deceive the demons into thinking them too unworthy to be molested.

782 During the month of July, when the streams are in flood, the
787 people observe the tabu of the rising and falling of the waters ("ta
823 dū ta htaw ta law"). They refrain from labor, make an offering of a fowl all of one color on the path near a stream, and utter the following prayer: "O Lord of the great water and the small water, of the oceans and the lakes. We are offering you a large sweet fowl and sweet rice. Flow in your own banks as usual, so that we shall not be drowned or fall into the water to be devoured by crocodiles and dragons. Watch over us on our journeys, eat our offerings, and do not molest us." They then examine the fowl's bones and the gall-bladder of a pig, and, if the omens are favorable, they swim the stream three times. In case no mishap occurs, they believe that their offerings have been acceptable and that they will prosper. If the omens are not propitious the first time, they try

[19] See Chapter XVIII on Birth Customs and Childhood, p. 170.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

782 787 823 a second time and if necessary a third, in order to obtain a favorable response.

755 The Karen esteem the gall-bladder of a certain variety of fish as a valuable medicine, but assert that during the early days of August this medicinal organ becomes enlarged and "hot" (that is, flabby). They, therefore, consider it necessary to desist from work, in order to restore the gall-bladder to its normal condition and efficacy. During the other months this medicine is thought to be strong and useful in certain severe illnesses.

751 784 The time for gathering the herbs of which dyestuffs are made, is determined by divination. If, however, some one happens to pick them on a day found to be unfavorable, he becomes subject to a tabu, lest colds and coughs should spread throughout the village. To prevent this epidemic, the erring person must cut a sheaf of tall grass and set it up in the ashes of his fireplace, and when the other villagers come in they must spit on it. An elder then takes up the grass, saying: "May all coughs and colds be prevented. May we not catch them." Next, he leads the people out into a field, where he plies their heads and the stumps in the field with the sheaf until it is broken, meantime calling out: "Beat here. Beat there. Beat the tails of the demons and woodpeckers. Do not bring us illnesses, coughs, or colds." When he has finished, he leaves the frayed grass against a stump, and they all return to their houses. Finally, the elder asks in a loud voice: "Is every one well?" and they all shout back: "All are well." This is repeated three times, after which they all shut their doors and refrain from work during the rest of the day.

784 626 While all of these numerous tabus have helped to nourish the ancient superstitions of the Karen, it is well to remember that some of them, in the absence of other social and moral sanctions, have exercised a beneficial influence. Among the latter are the tabus against marriage outside of the tribe, and especially outside of the race. These tabus have been instrumental in maintaining the integrity of the various tribes and of the people as a whole, and in enabling the Karen to live largely apart from the corrupting influences of neighboring peoples. Other tabus have served to magnify the importance of the religious rites and to enforce a stricter morality than prevails among some primitive races. It is obvious that these benefits have been secured at a great economic cost, when one considers the large number of holidays which falls